

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 231

By Jones

A RESOLUTION to honor Nashville Freedom Rider Etta Marie Simpson Ray.

WHEREAS, in December 1960, the Supreme Court ruled in *Boynton v. Virginia* that buses and trains should be desegregated and interstate passengers given equal access to any facilities served by those buses and trains; and

WHEREAS, Freedom Rides were then organized to test compliance with the court's decision; the first two groups of Freedom Riders, traveling on Trailways and Greyhound buses, were met with great violence; and

WHEREAS, on May 14, 1961, the first bus, upon arriving in Anniston, Alabama, was firebombed by a mob that also slashed the bus's tires and pressed against the doors in an attempt to hold the Riders inside as the bus burned; and

WHEREAS, the bus carrying the second group of Freedom Riders reached Anniston, Alabama, an hour later, and a mob boarded the bus and relentlessly beat the Riders; and

WHEREAS, knowing the fate of the first two Freedom Rides, Etta Marie Simpson Ray, a pioneer of the Nashville Student Movement and a nineteen-year-old Tennessee State University (then Tennessee A&I State University) student, joined thirteen of her fellow students and boarded a bus for Montgomery, Alabama; and

WHEREAS, at a stop in Birmingham, the Nashville Freedom Riders were met by an angry mob, then led by police into the bus station, where they spent the night with no lights, water, telephone, or use of bathrooms; the following day, they were driving to Montgomery, Alabama, where they were once again met by a mob; and

WHEREAS, Etta Ray also joined a later Freedom Ride to Jackson, Mississippi, where, on May 28, 1961, she was arrested and sent to Parchman State Prison for a short time before

making bond; along with other students who participated in the Freedom Rides, Ms. Ray returned to Nashville only to be expelled from college; and

WHEREAS, in the ensuing years, Etta Ray and her fellow students' heroic actions during the civil rights movement went largely unacknowledged, and she did not speak much about her experience, even with family, for decades; and

WHEREAS, however, forty-seven years later after those Freedom Rides, in 2008, Ms. Ray and her fellow expelled students were awarded honorary doctorate degrees from Tennessee State University; and

WHEREAS, the brave actions taken by Etta Ray and other Nashville Freedom Riders in 1961 to ensure desegregation of interstate travel are most worthy of our admiration and approbation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor Nashville Freedom Rider Etta Marie Simpson Ray for her courage in the face of great adversity and her trailblazing leadership in the fight for civil rights in Tennessee and beyond.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.